

The Nathan Commission of Inquiry

2 Samuel 11 & 12

Today we tune into the Nathan Commission.

The Nathan Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of power abuse by David the king.

It was set up by a Higher Power than the king, in partnership with a prophet named Nathan, as is the Higher Power's preferred way. Even a cursory glance at history will show this High Power has a long track record of prophetic partnerships. Prophets being those who have fallen in love with the truth so completely that they can't help themselves from telling the whole world about it.

It must be stated for the record that David was rather surprised to find himself before the Nathan Commission of Inquiry.

For two reasons: first he had forgotten that there was in fact a Higher Power than himself. This specific form of amnesia is a very common condition among kings. Political journals in every age are filled with peer review articles providing clear evidence of this. There is consensus that this particular variant of the disease enters the body through the ears ... at the sound of people's persistent praise and it spreads to the mind when the praise becomes worship. It takes over the mind the moment this worship is received and believed, and if this worship is actively sort after, tests show that the person's heart shrinks. If it reaches the stage where this worship is demanded and enforced, one can be sure that death is close at hand.

The second reason for David's surprise, besides his amnesia, was the way the Commission took place. It simply caught David off guard. One minute Nathan appeared before him as an entertaining storyteller, and the next minute it was David who was appearing before Nathan – having to give an account of himself not only to Nathan – but to Nathan's larger than life Partner – with everything on record for all the world to witness.

Now, we all know how long these Commissions can go on for, we only have time this morning to listen to a tiny segment.

The segment is from The Nathan Commission's Final Report, and it includes the brief yet crucial confession of David. A confession that was skillfully extracted by Nathan himself. We know not Nathan's age, but we know him to be gifted with great maturity. A maturity best seen in his ability to speak the truth in love to power (Ephesians 4). There are few finer examples of speaking the truth in love to power, than Nathan speaking with David, especially taking note of how high the odds were of something going *dead* wrong.

Nathan knew two things for sure about the human condition: First, that we have highly developed defense mechanisms that neither sleep nor slumber. They are multilayered, operational at both a conscious and sub-conscious level. Put bluntly – they very sneaky indeed.

Second, Nathan knew even though we may be dead to the truth regarding our own life, we may not be dead to the truth in its entirety. In fact, quite often we are most alive to the wrong that we are dead to inside ourselves, when that same wrong is resident in another person. Nathan relies on this strange phenomenon in his approach to David. I guess we could call this strange phenomenon a type of resurrection: inside us the truth can be dead and buried but the moment this same truth is buried in another person, miracle of miracles the stone is rolled away from our eyes and the truth stands up, easily seen. What was dead is alive. Alive in all its revealing glory. In other fields of study, they call it projection.

This knowledge of the human condition clearly guides Nathan's *truth in love* approach.

So, what does Nathan do? Nathan brings the truth near to David through the distance of a story. Sometimes truth must take the scenic route, not as a compromise, but as a necessity to negotiate through our defense mechanisms. The faraway distance of a story is what delivers the truth right into David's heart.

Nathan's story:

'There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.' Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'

David is still alive to the truth...the truth at a distance. The truth in another. And he is angry (As our benediction of disturbance each Sunday summons us: May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people...) David is blessed with anger.

David is also not shy to suggest decisive action. Listen:

1. He deserves to die!
2. Yet we will settle for a fine. 4-fold of original cost. (Years into the future a tax collector called Zacchaeus, standing before the Jesus Commission will volunteer a 4-fold reparation package to all he defrauded).
3. Motivation of sentence: He did what he did and he showed no pity (No Remorse. He had no sense of wrong doing at all).

David has literally jumped into the story. The story that he was in all the time – yet without knowing it. All that is left for Nathan to do, is to draw the link between the truth David so clearly sees in the story with the same truth that David remains blind to in his own life.

We all need Nathan's in our life. People who help us to see ourselves as we truly are.

Nathan does so clearly and simply. Using just four words: "You are the man!"

They are spoken in love which remains the best container to carry the truth. In other words, Nathan speaks from a place of grief, not glee. Grief for the death and destruction David has done to others and himself.

Nathan wisely follows up his four words very quickly with a lot more words from his Higher Power partner – now clearly revealed as the Lord God. This is "Tag-truth telling" at its best – both taking turns to get into the ring with David.

"I anointed you king ... I rescued you from the hand of Saul ... I gave you your master's house, etc. and if you had wanted more all you had to do was ask! But what do you do?"

"You have despised my word ... you have done what is evil ... You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, (David saying: who me?) killed him with the sword of the Ammonites – and you took his wife.

All the Lord God has done is give and give. All David has done is take and take. So much for David having a heart after the Lord. Here he stands as the Lord's polar opposite.

Pinned on the ropes...David is stunned. Who wouldn't be? Barely audible, he speaks: "I have sinned against the Lord."

When a king, or a president for that matter, appears before a Commission of Inquiry we must understand that if they speak the truth at all, it is going to be clipped back to the bare minimum. You will not find the words: stolen, raped or killed on their lips because they know to do so is to design the election posters of the opposition. And what's more is that they would probably be taken out by their own party: "Too much truth is hard to bare." (TS Eliot).

The clipped back truth may sound like this: "State Capture took place on our watch as the governing party." In other words: "It happened." Short and to the point, without excuses or trying to defend the indefensible. Or simply: "I have sinned against the Lord."

What does this mean exactly?

Well according to the sharp political journalist at the Daily Truth, Stephen Big-Insight "it means that David is admitting to everything the Lord God has just confronted him with. According to Stephen Big-Insight, David is saying: "It is as you say it is, Lord. I've done as you have said I have done."

David's confession, clipped as it is – brings final clarity to what actually took place.

Yet sadly, different versions remain – no doubt unhelpfully aided by social media pushing fake news. The worst and most persistent recycled lie is that Bathsheba was "looking for it" – a sleazy slogan got some twitter traction: "Bathsheba baited the king with her bare bathing".

Even though there is no evidence of this in the text, and it is at complete odds with the fact that The Nathan Commission's Final Report makes it clear that David raped Bathsheba, on his own admission. However, the lie persists.

Nowhere does Bathsheba say "yes". Nowhere does she give her consent. In fact, again relying on an astute journalist from The Daily Truth, Marianne Thoughtfulness, who puts it plainly: "the power dynamics that exist between Bathsheba and the king, make consent impossible."

Tragically however, Bathsheba, like so many women after her to this day, are not only sinned against, but thereafter held responsible for the sin. Not only violated by the crime but blamed for the crime far into the future.

Even the headings in the Bible fail to tell the truth. "David commits adultery with Bathsheba", is the heading. So at best Bathsheba is an adulterous and at worst a bare-bathing-baiter. Nowhere on this spectrum is there space for the truth. David is a rapist.

Not only is David a rapist, but he is also a murderer. Yet some still praise him as the greatest of kings. No wonder cartoonists crown him with a Teflon pan.

Let us take a quick look at some of the details:

In the process of trying to cover up his rape of Bathsheba – he sent for her husband Uriah to return from the battle field. After a little chit chat about how the war was going, David sends Uriah to his home. David fully expects Uriah to be a person after his own heart – and did not think for a second that Uriah would not go and enjoy some homely comforts with his wife – leaving no one the wiser about who had made her pregnant.

Uriah doesn't argue with the king, but nor does he obey him. Uriah sleeps outside for all to see.

The next day, David questions Uriah on his strange behaviour. Strange, for how principled it was.

Uriah replies by reminding David that the Ark of the Lord (symbol of God / Higher Power presence) is basically camping in a make shift booth and his fellow soldiers are camping out in an open field, and therefore he could

never accept more homely comfort than his God or comrades. The two things that David had forgotten while lounging on his deck couch.

David is stubborn in his plan. Believing, every *man* has his price. He gets Uriah drunk, thinking this will lead Uriah to his home and to his bed. And what do we learn?

Even a drunk Uriah is more faithful than a sober David.

So David re-drafts Uriah to the front-line with instructions to his trusted hatchet man, General Joab to leave Uriah exposed to enemy fire. “The Nathan Commission’s Final Report noted how David used organs of the State to cover up his personal wrong-doing. And how he later granted General Joab a presidential pardon with the words: “Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours now one and now another...”

Uriah’s murder is hidden in the blood of battle – together with other soldiers. Letters to their widows are sent, all speaking of their husband’s “brave service.”

The Nathan Commission of Inquiry Final Report is an important document, as was the process. It must never be underestimated the good that will come from it in the future, because now that the mechanisms of power abuse have been revealed it will be that much more difficult for people to use them in the same way in the future.

But...we must be honest and admit that the Commission falls way short of doing justice. Again, even according to David’s own admission. Remember he said: Death is deserved! Little did he know that he was speaking of his own death! Then he suggested a 4-fold reparation payment.

Yet there is no evidence of this. David, who deserves death, according to his own tongue, does not step down. He even refuses to step aside!

Joab remains General, exonerated by his fellow top brass – and clutching onto his pardon he repeats the mantra of disgraced soldiers: “I was only following orders.” While the widows of the fallen smooth over the folded flag they have been given, wishing it to be the skin of their children’s father.

Bathsheba whose experience and voice and needs and desires should be centred in any process of restorative justice and reparations is non-existent. Traumatically she is taken by David to live with him. David – her rapist and murderer of her husband Uriah.

The Commission documented the truth, but it did not enforce what must take place for this truth to be honoured. This was “beyond its mandate” – some argued. It could “only make recommendations”, others said.

David had confessed and Nathan past on forgiveness from on high, as is the mercy of the Lord’s generosity, but please note death still followed. Death entered David’s house! David’s bloodletting started something that not even his confession and the Lord’s forgiveness could stop.

This is a hard truth to hear and therefore too seldom spoken, but I say it in love. In grief, not glee: sometimes the consequences of our wrong doing lives long after our confession of our wrong doing. Confession does not always stop consequences, especially if our confession barely names our sin without making just reparations for our sin.

Now let me end.

Again I speak as one in grief. This story I have re-told today is *our* country’s story. We know the truth – it is written up in Commission after Commission, but we stubbornly refuse to honour the truth that many have paid a high price to speak and publish for our hoped for freedom and healing. This truth will only be honoured by doing justice. Justice as 4-fold reparations.

The longer we take to do so, the greater certainty that more death will enter our households. More death lies in our future.

Alan Storey
Central Methodist Mission
08/08/2021

Prayer (by a member of CMM – Joan Proudfoot)

Jesus it was you who made the profound statement that the truth will set us free. Not only did you state it but you backed it up with every detail of your life. You showed us a speaking and a being that was convincing for some and highly threatening to others. History has played out the choices of those who chose truth and those who have viciously opposed it.

Your words take our attention to our truth-tellers of today...the whistle-blowers and responsible journalists who courageously hold power to account. How do we pray for them? We take some time to imagine their lives: for the journalist: the hours spent doggedly collecting facts, the danger they put themselves in to do so, the emotional strain of receiving death threats to shut them up, the highs and lows of adrenaline in their blood that affect their mental health as does their exposure to the raw evil within society. And for the whistle-blowers...the high levels of anxiety their decisions took them to. And now the fear of exposure, the resulting loss of employment and falling from highly influential jobs to struggling to pay their children's school fees because no one will employ them. We pray that you will surround them with people and poems and moments of sheer grace that inspire them to go on. We pray that you will deepen their belief that the truth will indeed set this world free. Our hearts are filled with a deep gratitude for them. We cannot pray for them without praying for ourselves. We pray that we will honour the truth and these truth-tellers by reading and exposing ourselves to what they are saying even though we become overwhelmed at the daily magnitude of truth-revealing facts in the news. Forgive us for sometimes veering towards social media which is easier to read and juicier to contemplate. Increase our awareness of its sensationalism which keeps us from reading the writings of those who hold themselves accountable to truth, a truth that often is spoken out on behalf of the poor.

And, ultimately, may we come to understand deep within our beings, that the truth will set us free, and in so believing, may we become life-giving truth-tellers to ourselves and all we meet. Amen.

Joan Proudfoot
Central Methodist Mission